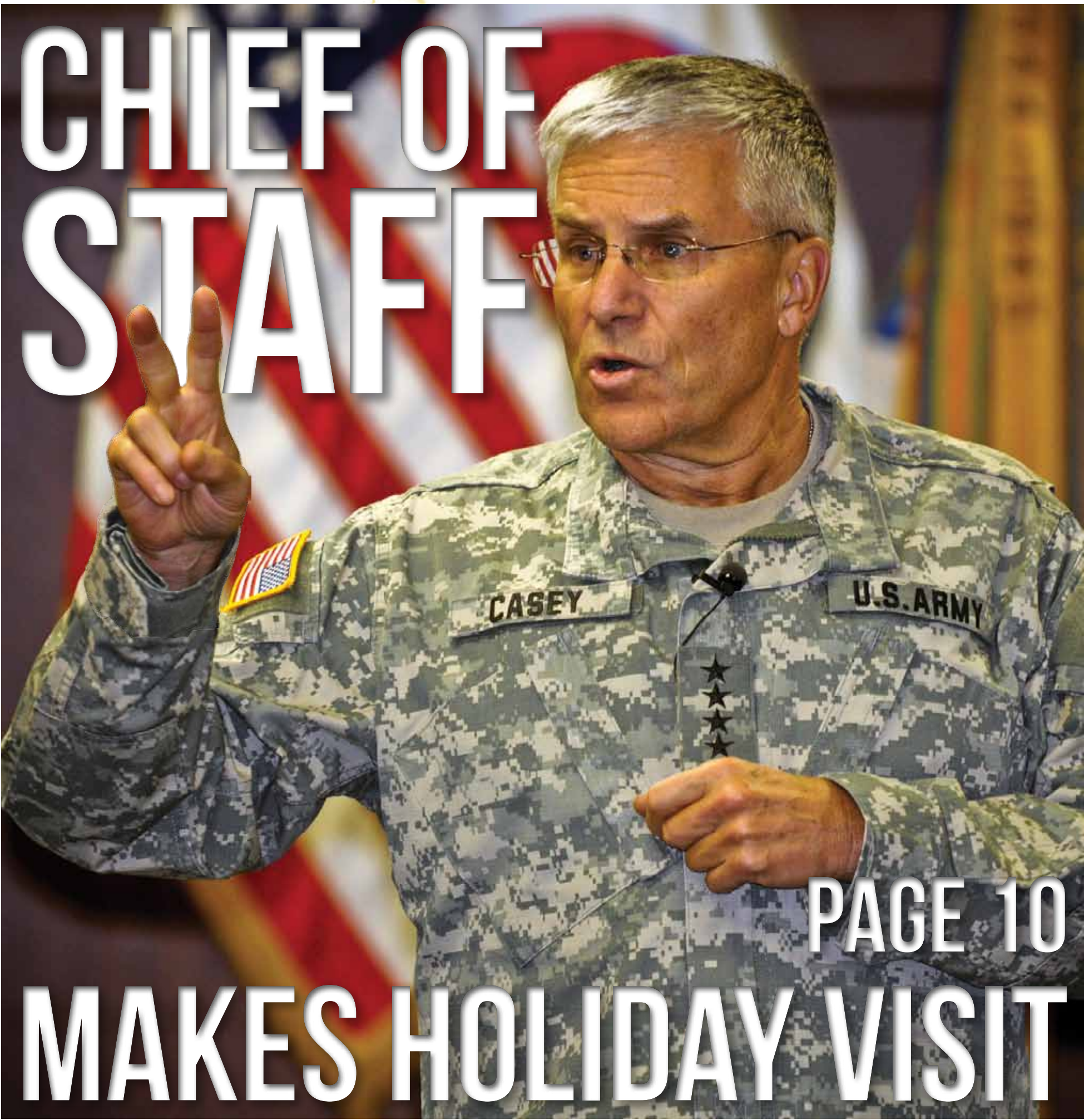




LIGHTNING STRIKES



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2 UNITED STATES DIVISION – CENTER JANUARY 10, 2011

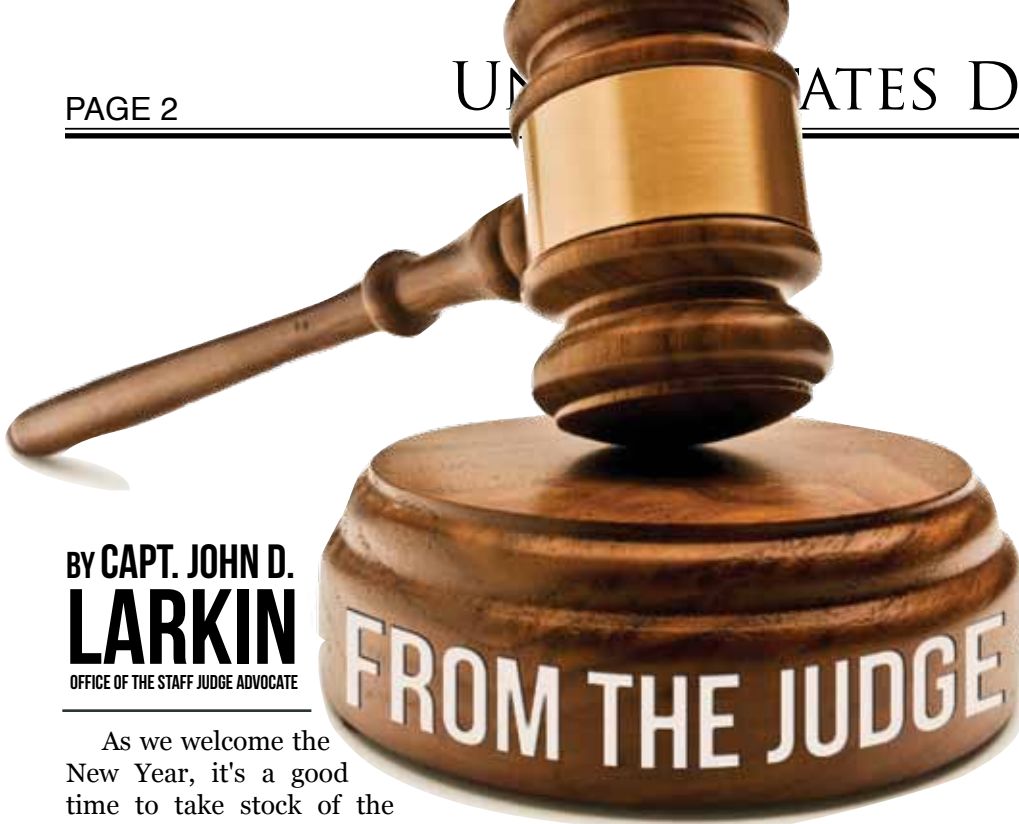


CHIEF OF STAFF

PAGE 10

MAKES HOLIDAY VISIT

Photo courtesy of U.S. Army



BY CAPT. JOHN D.
LARKIN
OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE

As we welcome the New Year, it's a good time to take stock of the past 12 months and to devote some serious thought to what awaits us in the days ahead. While it's difficult to predict the future in, even the calmest of times, the words of Benjamin Franklin ring true generations later, "Taxes are one of the very few true certainties in life."

Most likely, you have already noticed the changes to your leave and earnings statement since you arrived in Iraq. If you haven't noticed those changes, now might be a good time to show your LES

to your noncommissioned officer support channel. One of the most obvious differences in your pay is that federal and state taxes are not withheld while you are deployed. However, there are significant additional tax benefits to serving overseas and these advantages do not end upon your redeployment.

On April 15, most Americans will face a deadline for filing their taxes for the year that ended on Dec. 31, 2010. However, your service in Iraq entitles

you to an automatic extension of this deadline. You will not be required to file a tax return until at least 180 days after you return from the deployment. You don't have to file any paperwork to receive this extension; it is automatic.

In addition to the 180-day extension, you are also entitled to an additional extension for each day that you were deployed during the filing period (January 1st to April 15th of each year). For example, if you were in Iraq for the entire filing period, you would be entitled to add 105 days to the automatic 180 days after your return to the United States, for a grand total of 285 days. If, on the other hand, you redeployed on January 2nd, you would only be able to add two days to the automatic 180-day extension, for a still-substantial total extension of 182 days.

When you do get around to preparing your taxes, there are significant resources at your disposal. Starting Jan 17, Military OneSource will be providing free access to the H&R Block At Home® tax preparation program. The site can be found at www.militaryonesource.com/MOS/FindInformation/Category/TaxFilingServices.aspx. They will also be providing free telephone consultations on tax preparation.

If you want a friend or Family mem-

ber in the United States to prepare and file your taxes for you while you are deployed, you should come to the United States Division – Center Legal Center and fill out a special power of attorney form. This form, which takes less than five minutes to complete, gives your representative in the United States the power to prepare and file taxes while you are still deployed. This is a particularly good idea if you do not have access to important financial records that are still at home. Of course, the extension to the filing deadline allows service members to wait until they return to the United States before filing taxes, if they so choose.

If you need further information concerning filing taxes while on or immediately after a deployment, a good place to start is the Internal Revenue Service's "Armed Forces Tax Guide," which is available in PDF format at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3.pdf.

Questions about the law? Capt. John D. Larkin is available to answer your questions at the USD-C Legal Center, conveniently located at the corner of Division Loop and Sapper Road. Just come by, or call 847-2388 (DSN) to set up an appointment. Hours of operations are 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. 🇺🇸

USD-C LOGISTICS SOLDIERS KEEP MAIL OPERATIONS RUNNING DURING HOLIDAYS

Story and photo by
Capt. Jaqueline Ralston
2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., USD-C

BAGHDAD—Some individuals may be familiar with variations of the old saying that declares despite rain, snow, sleet or hail, the mail must be delivered. However, for the Soldiers running postal operations for the 299th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center at Camp Liberty, Iraq, the reality they face is a little different—rain, mud, dust or heat.

The mail clerks of the battalion, led by Staff Sgt. Barbara Robb, noncom-

missioned officer-in-charge of personnel with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 299th BSB, 2nd AAB and a Staten Island, N.Y., native, work every day—picking up mail from the Joint Military Mail Terminal at Baghdad International Airport, transporting it to the battalion headquarters, sorting and distributing it, ensuring Soldiers receive their letters and packages regardless of the weather conditions.

The holidays are busier than ever, Robb said.

"The (unit personnel section has been) pushing packages out as quickly as we get them in," she said. "The Soldiers are working hard to ensure everyone receives their notes and care packages from loved ones back home."

"It is always great to see Soldiers finding out they have mail," said Spc. Deanna Francois, primary mail clerk with 299th BSB, 2nd AAB and a Junction City, Kan., native. "I love seeing the smiles on their faces when they receive it."

"Getting mail at Christmastime is even more significant than getting it throughout the year because it shows that people are thinking about us over here," said Sgt. Nathan Allen, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 299th BSB, 2nd AAB and a Joplin, Mo. native. "It definitely helps us get through the holidays." Allen received a package from a family who adopted him through the "Adopt a Soldier" program, he said.

The mail room Soldiers of the 299th BSB, 2nd AAB said they have processed and delivered more than 700 packages and letters since arriving in theater in November.

In addition, the mail clerks coordinate with other battalions within the brigade to ensure that Soldiers from the 299th BSB, who are located on remote forward operating bases, are receiving their mail as well.

"There are a lot of loved ones back home who are taking time to send us mail," Francois said. "I want them to know how much we appreciate it and look forward to seeing our names on envelopes and boxes. It really helps us feel their encouragement and love, even though we are far away." 🇺🇸



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CONTRIBUTORS

ARMY RESERVE CHIEF VISITS USD-C SOLDIERS

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. April Davis
116th Garrison Command, USD-C

BAGHDAD—Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz, chief of the Army Reserve, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael D. Schultz, command sergeant major of the Army Reserve, visited deployed Soldiers Dec. 26 at Victory Base Complex in Baghdad, Iraq.

Members of the Army Reserve, serving in Iraq under United States Division – Center, gathered for a town hall meeting at Camp Victory to ask Stultz questions and discuss issues affecting them.

“The Army, today, can’t accomplish what it does without you,” Stultz told the reservists during the town hall meeting. “I tell everyone who will listen that you are a national treasure.”

“As I travel around the world, the

question I get asked most often is, ‘How have you built such a capable and professional reserve force?’” Stultz said. “The fact that other countries want to create a reserve force modeled after you is a testament to you and your dedication.”

Stultz discussed promotions with the reservists, explaining how strength, training requirements and the location of where the Soldier lives in relation to a Reserve unit with an available slot all play a role in determining eligibility.

“We are in the process of shaping the force, trying to make a better formation,” Stultz said. “I need to put the right people with the right ranks and the right job skills in the right locations.”

Schultz advised deployed Soldiers to keep up on the changes taking place with promotion requirements, including structured self-development courses, and to take advantage of online education oppor-

tunities available through Army distance learning courses and civilian institutions.

“A lot of changes are moving forward right now and the train is moving fast,” he said. “Keep up on the changes, so when you get home from deployment you are not behind your peers who stayed behind.”

Schultz also reminded the reservists to become familiar with the Army’s new physical readiness training which replaces previous physical fitness training manuals.


Other topics discussed at the town hall meeting included health benefits for reservists when they return from deployment, the retirement system and civilian employment opportunities.

“Employers in America are starting to wake up to what a national treasure you are,” Stultz said. “Only a small percentage of the American population meets all of the educational, physical and background requirements to serve in the military. Civilian employers face the same challenge. The criteria we look for to enlist Soldiers is the same criteria employers look for in their employees.”

Stultz said medical companies, hospitals and law enforcement agencies, among many other top companies, are lining up to join the Army Reserve Employer Partnership Initiative. It is not just out of patriotism, but because of the skills that Soldiers bring to the table.

“You have a different set of values, work ethic and integrity that employers can appreciate,” he said.

Stultz and Schultz also presided over several award presentations and promotions during the town hall meeting. They promoted three Soldiers, administered the oath of enlistment for two Soldiers re-enlisting and formally recognized eight Soldiers with certificates of achievement. After the town hall, the chief and sergeant major ate lunch with Army Reserve Soldiers in the dining facility at Camp Liberty.

For information on civilian employment opportunities for reservists, visit Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces at www.employerpartnership.org. For information on Army Physical Readiness Training visit www.armyprt.com. For information on educational opportunities, login to Army Knowledge Online and click the My Education link under the Self Service menu. 



Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz (right), chief of the Army Reserve, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael D. Schultz (second from right), command sergeant major of the Army Reserve, recognize Army Reserve Soldiers serving under United States Division Center and United States Forces Iraq for significant achievements Dec. 26 at Camp Victory in Baghdad. Stultz and Schultz stopped at Victory Base Complex along their tour visiting deployed Army Reserve units throughout Iraq during the holiday season.

USD-C SOLDIERS TEACH IA TROOPS LAND NAVIGATION

Story and photo by
Capt. Jake Turner
2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., USD-C

BAGHDAD—December has been a busy month for Soldiers with Company B, 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center. The first week of the month was a flurry of activity, as the company transitioned into its new role in Iraq while training, advising and assisting their Iraqi Security Forces partners.

After assuming responsibility, one of the first tasks the company undertook was to conduct combined land navigation training with Soldiers of the 6th Iraqi Army Division.

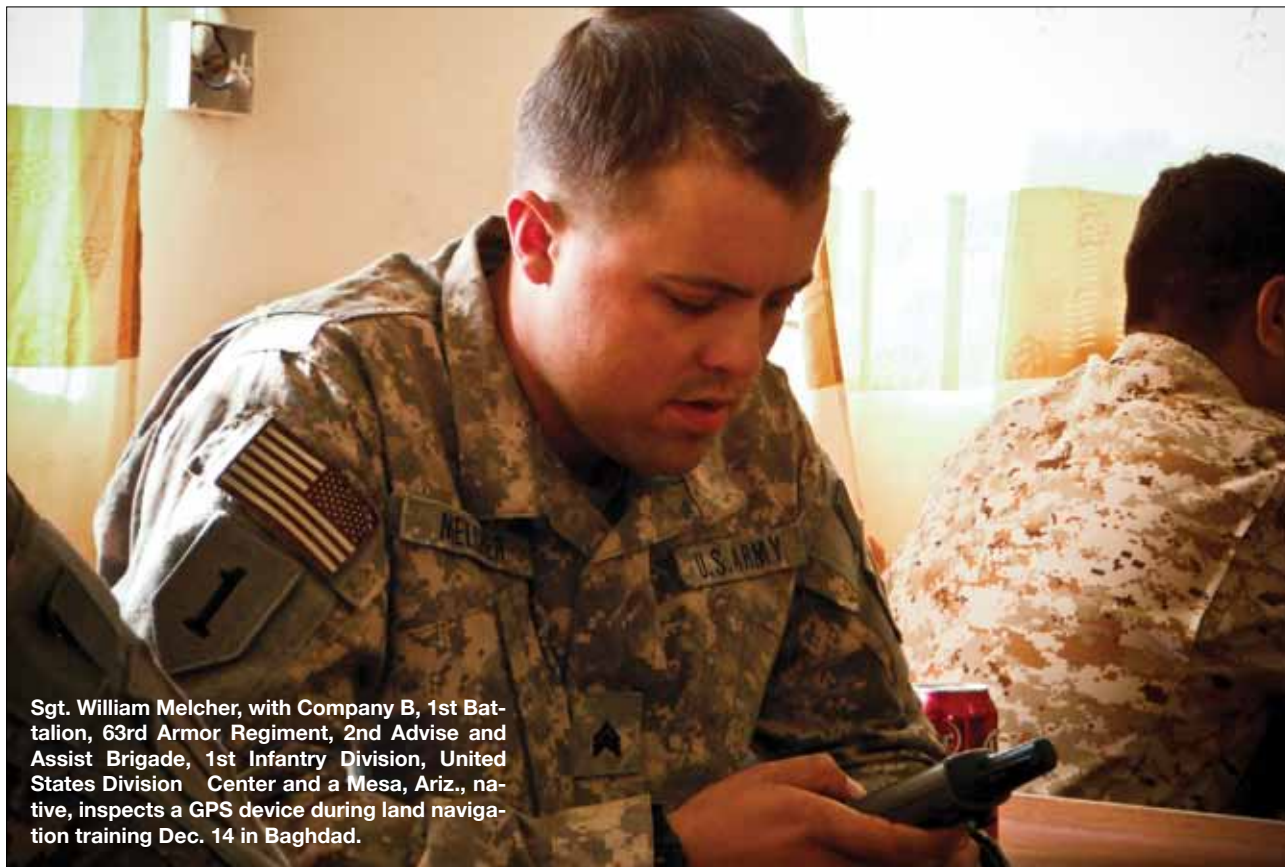
Soldiers from both units began training Dec. 13 during the early morning hours. Together, they focused on learning basic land navigation skills—skills essential to any modern military force.

Solid knowledge of navigation tools and techniques can allow Soldiers to move quickly and accurately on the battlefield, while taking maximum tactical advantage of terrain, said 2nd Lt. Kyle Litchfield, with Company B, 1st Bn., 63rd Armor Regt. and a Charlotte, N.C., native.

The training began with tasks designed to build the students' understanding of navigation tools, like maps, compasses and GPS devices.

Both old and new navigation tools have benefits and drawbacks. While maps never run out of batteries or break, they lack the ability of a GPS device to track current location through the use of satellite signals. Generally, Soldiers use both means of navigation, Litchfield said.

The Soldiers with the 6th IA Div. laid a foundation for more advanced work by first learning standard map reading techniques, including recognizing major terrain features and plotting locations on the map. These two techniques, used together, give Soldiers a logical and mathematical technique for locating themselves on a map.



Sgt. William Melcher, with Company B, 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center and a Mesa, Ariz., native, inspects a GPS device during land navigation training Dec. 14 in Baghdad.

The Iraqi Soldiers built on their skills, learning to navigate using a GPS device. With a GPS device, Soldiers can plan and store routes electronically and follow directions to arrive at their destination, even when traveling cross country. In order to familiarize themselves with GPS capabilities, U.S. and Iraqi Soldiers worked together to navigate to a series of locations using GPS devices.

Sgt. Joseph Harleman, with Company B, 1st Bn., 63rd Armor Regt. and a Fremont, Neb., native, said the teams performed well and the shared experience helped to build a sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

During the course, Soldiers from both countries spent time teaching each other. U.S. Army noncom-

missioned officers and Soldiers taught the first half of the course, and Iraqi Army officers taught the second half.

"The student-teaching segment was extremely successful," Litchfield said. "Our platoon trainers filled sheets of notes and had no serious critiques for the instruction."

A number of Iraqi Army officers performed particularly well during the training and were identified as future instructors, Litchfield said.

Company B intends to continue conducting missions throughout their deployment, Litchfield said, that enable its partnered Iraqi units to provide internal and external security for the people of Iraq more effectively. ♥

SENIOR ENLISTED SOLDIERS CONTINUE PARTNERSHIP WITH IRAQI POLICE

Story and photo by
Capt. Brian Cotter
2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., USD-C

BAGHDAD—One of the major efforts of the U.S. advise and assist mission in Iraq has been the development of a strong and capable noncommissioned officer corps.

On Dec. 18, the senior NCOs of 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center began the process of fostering a strong relationship with the NCOs in their partnered unit, the Iraqi 1st Federal Police Division.

"Historically, the Iraqi military has been in the Soviet—officer-centric—mold," said Command Sgt. Maj. William Bauer, command sergeant major of 1st Bn., 7th FA Regt. "Now, with the U.S. working with them, we'll see if that changes. Their officers have to see what their NCOs are capable of."

While enthusiastic about the potential of the 1st FP's NCOs, Bauer said they have a long way to go in their development as leaders within their organization.

Along with Bauer, several other senior NCOs from 1st Bn., 7th FA Regt. attended a dinner—a way for the U.S. and Iraqi leaders to get to know each other—hosted by Sgt. Maj. Maky H. Mansor, sergeant major with the 1st FP Div.

Perhaps the most critical facet of this partnership is the professional development of the FP's NCOs—a process which begins with the command sergeant major.

"The command sergeant major is the key link in the NCO corps," said

Master Sgt. David Rogers, information operations coordinator with 1st Bn., 7th FA Regt. and a Pittsburgh native.

With the Iraqi military and police so focused on leadership from its officer corps, attempting to enhance the stature of senior enlisted personnel will be a challenge, Rogers said.

"We don't have as much focus on their NCOs as we should at times, but now our command sergeant major is making it a focus," Rogers said.

Increasing their capabilities starts

with interaction, Bauer said.

"For (Iraqi) policemen, seeing the interaction between their senior NCOs and ours will have a great effect," Bauer said, emphasizing the effect the relationship with American senior leadership can have on reinforcing the credibility of the FP's NCOs.

Bauer said as far as he is concerned, these effects can already be seen in the reputation Maky now holds in the 1st FP Div.

"(Maky) seems to wield an unlimited amount of respect from his (policemen) and has a strong leadership presence," Bauer said.

Moving forward, the senior NCOs in 1st Bn., 7th FA Regt. said they hope to build on the relationship established over their first dinner with Maky. The importance of that relationship is not lost on Bauer.

"I plan to visit (Sgt. Maj.) Maky at least four or five times a week," Bauer said.

His efforts, along with those of his fellow NCOs, will be critical in leaving the 1st FP Div. with a capable and competent force upon which the Iraqi people can rely. ♥



Senior noncommissioned officers with 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center prepare to eat dinner with Sgt. Maj. Maky H. Mansor, sergeant major of the Iraqi 1st Federal Police Division, Dec. 18 at Joint Security Station Loyalty, Iraq

1ST INF DIV SOLDIERS RECEIVE COMBAT AWARDS

Story and photo by
Spc. William K. Ermatinger
2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., USD-C

CAMP TAJI, Iraq—Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment “Vanguards,” 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center were authorized to wear the “Big Red One” shoulder sleeve insignia – former wartime service, better known as a “combat patch” Dec. 21 during a ceremony at Camp Taji, Iraq. The unit also recognized 13 Soldiers who were part of a convoy struck by two roadside bombs.

Twelve infantrymen received the Combat Infantryman Badge. The 13th Soldier, a medic, received the Combat Medical Badge.

First platoon, Company A, 1st Bn., 18th Inf. Regt., 2nd AAB, was conducting a joint patrol with the Iraqi Army Dec. 5 in northern Baghdad when the patrol was struck by multiple improvised explosive devices.

“We had just finished our mission and were getting ready to return to base,” said Pfc. Maxwell Hrics, an infantryman with Company A, 1st Bn., 18th Inf. Regt., 2nd AAB and a Washington, D. C., native. “Just as we had just turned around to head home, I heard the first explosion. Then the second explosion went off, but it was much closer.”

Pfc. Michael Canales, the platoon medic and a Corpus Christi, Texas, native—nicknamed “Doc” by the platoon—was with the patrol that night.

“I heard an explosion and looked to my right,” Canales said. “Just then, a second explosion hit the vehicle I was riding in. I wanted to make sure everyone was alright. We just instinctively pulled the gunner in to have a look at him. He was OK, and we let everyone know over the radio that everybody was unharmed.”




Lt. Col. John Cross (left), commander of 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division Center, awards the Combat Infantryman Badge to Pvt. Dominic Mers (center), an infantryman with Company A, 1st Bn., 18th Inf. Regt., 2nd AAB and a Eureka, Mo., native, Dec. 21 at Camp Taji, Iraq.

“That night was a learning experience for all of us who have never seen any action,” said Pfc. Jeff Childress, an infantryman with Company A, 1st Bn., 18th Inf. Regt., 2nd AAB and a Richmond, Va., native. “The reality of what could happen, and the cost we could pay, makes me proud to have

the standards that we do. It makes me strive to be my best.”

The Combat Infantryman Badge was created by the War Department on Oct. 27, 1943, and was once popularly called the “Fighter Badge.” The Combat Medical Badge was created in January 1945, and is awarded to medics supporting infantry units during active ground combat. To date, more than 41,000 Combat Infantryman Badges and 12,000 Combat Medical

Badges have been awarded during Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn.

Following the combat badge presentations, nearly 400 Soldiers assigned and attached to the Vanguard Battalion at Camp Taji, Iraq were awarded shoulder sleeve insignia – former wartime service by their chains of command. Wearing the insignia signifies that the Soldier has served in a combat zone. 



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Pfc. DeAngelo Taylor (right), an infantryman with Company A, 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division Center, receives his 1st Inf. Div. combat patch and the Combat Infantryman Badge Dec. 21 at Camp Taji, Iraq.

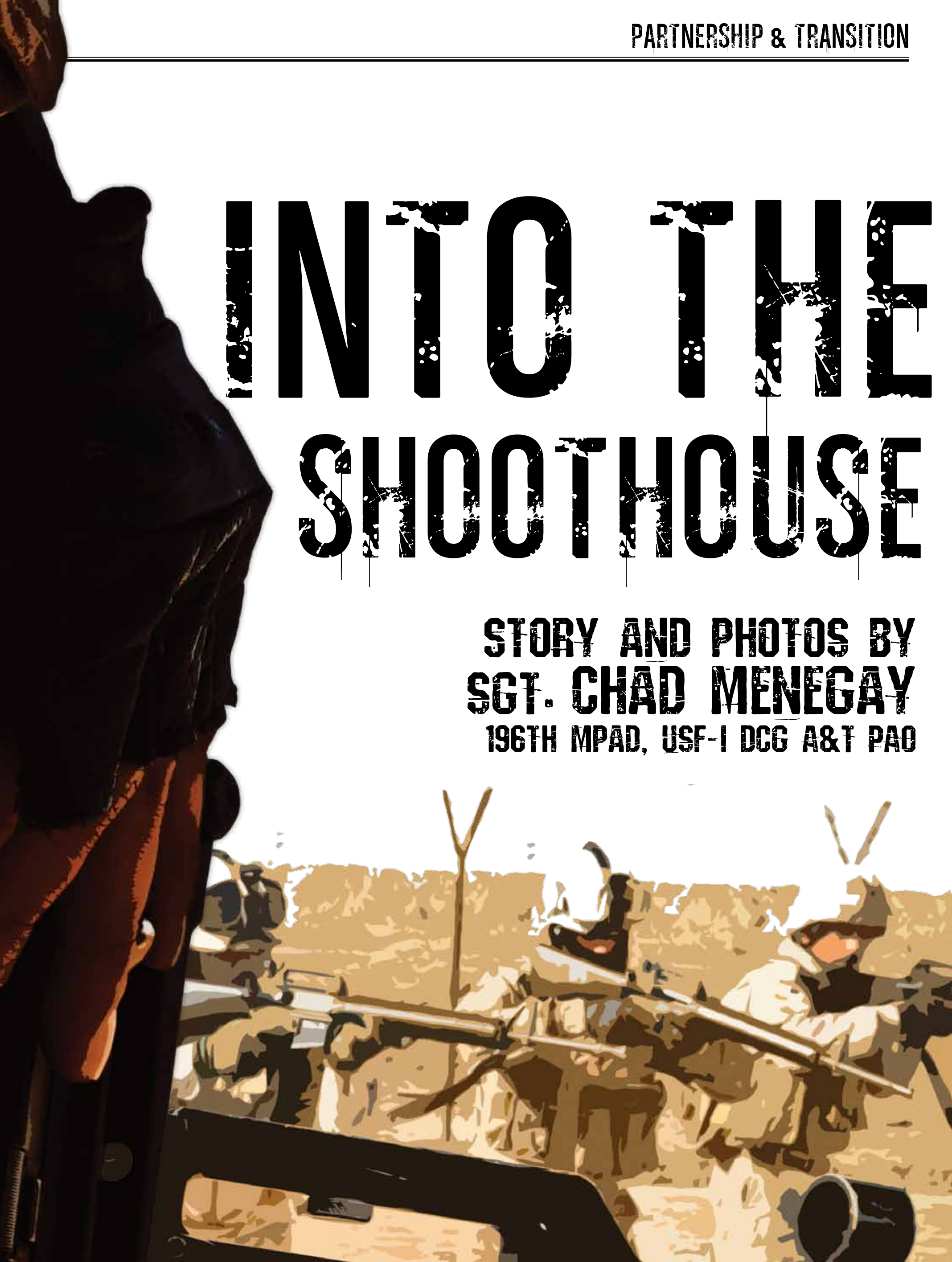


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INTO THE SHOOTHOUSE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SGT. CHAD MENEGAY
196TH MPAD, USF-I DCG A&T PAO





IRAQI ARMY HO COMMAND



Iraqi Army Soldiers with 2nd Company, Commando Battalion, 11th Iraqi Army Division, based out of Joint Security Station Old MoD in Baghdad, practice entering and clearing a building in a glass house drill Dec. 23 prior to an urban operations live-fire exercise at Camp Taji, Iraq. The live-fire shoot house served as the culminating event of an 18-day counter terrorism course.

BAGHDAD—Perhaps officials with the Iraq Ministry of Defense understand that, as the Iraqi Army continues to fight an insurgency, its battle-tested Soldiers need time to train away from the fight to perfect skills for the fight.

As evidence, Soldiers with 2nd Company, Commando Battalion, 11th Iraqi Army Division, based out of Joint Security Station Old MoD in Baghdad, trained on urban operations and entering and clearing rooms Dec. 22-23 under the instruction of Soldiers with Com-

pany B 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center, at Camp Taji, Iraq.

The 18-day counter-terrorism course culminated with a live-fire exercise in a “shoot house.”

“The live-fire makes them feel important and instills confidence to prove what they can do,” said Capt. Eric C. Smith, commander of Company B, 1st Bn., 18th Inf. Regt. and a Milwaukee native.

Many Iraqi Army Soldiers enlist, go through a brief

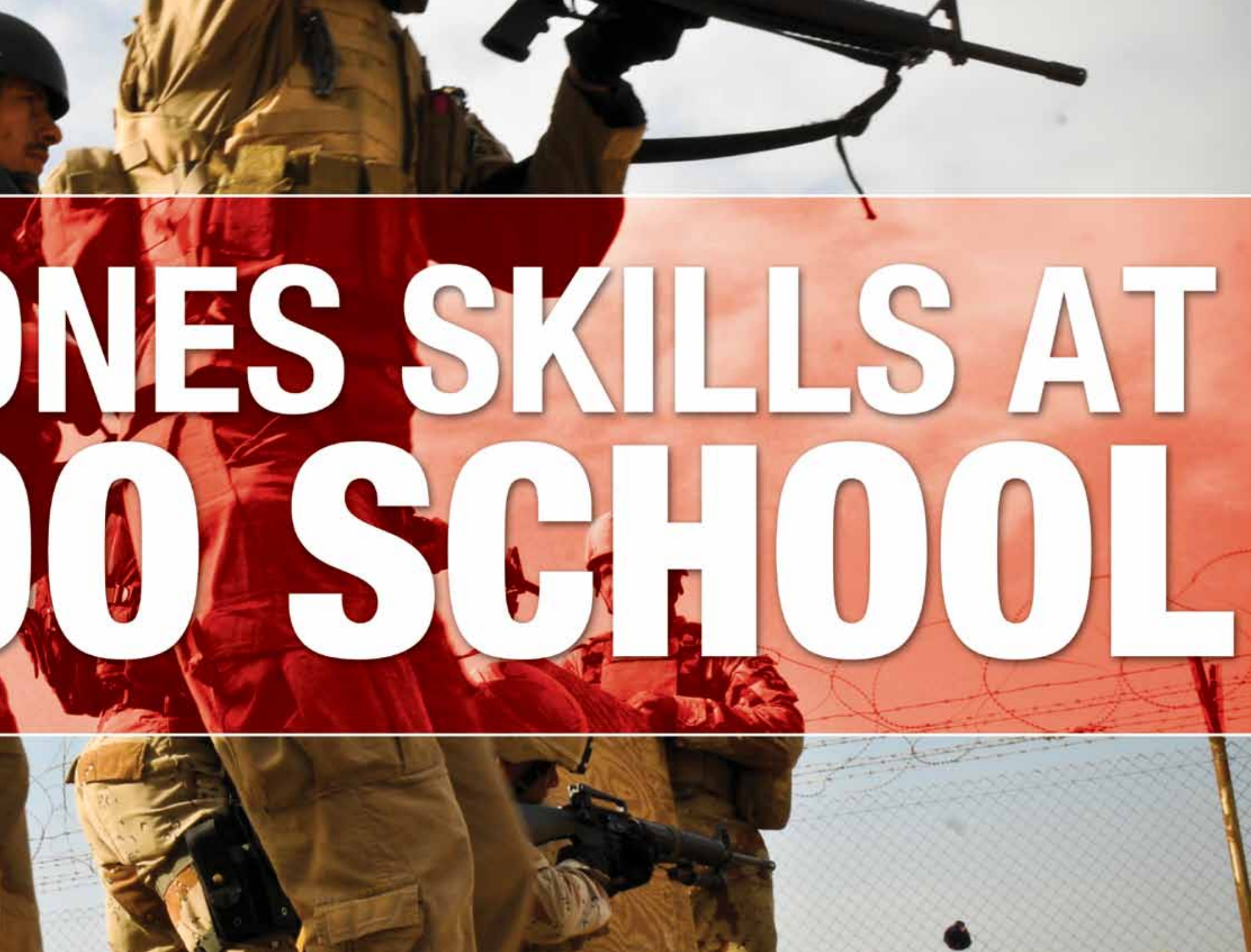
basic training and go straight into combat, he said.

“It’s brutal,” Smith said. “A lot of these guys have watched their friends die; they’ve fought for years. They don’t get a chance to go home sometimes, because the mission calls. A lot of these guys have been beaten up for years, so this is a vote of confidence to them that, yes, there is light at the end of the tunnel ... that they are capable of doing room clearing—it’s confidence.”

Iraqi Army Sgt. Amir Ali Hammad with 2nd Com-



Iraqi Army Soldiers with 2nd Company, Commando Battalion, 11th Iraqi Army Division, based out of Joint Security Station Old MoD in Baghdad, prepare to enter and clear a building Dec. 22 during an urban operations live-fire exercise at Camp Taji, Iraq. The live-fire shoot house served as the culminating event of an 18-day counter terrorism course.



ONES SKILLS AT OO SCHOOL

pany, Commando Battalion, 11th Iraqi Army Division, was shot three times in a 2007 terrorist attack in Ramadi, Iraq. He is not deterred and continues to fight, and train to fight, the insurgency.

"I will continue to rebuild Iraq," Amir said. "Until my last breath I will always keep fighting. There are a lot of people who need protection. We'll follow the insurgents everywhere they go."

The 11th IA Div. uses its commandos as a maneuver strike element to seize high value targets or weapons caches.

The Iraqi Army is focused on pinpoint surgical operations, Smith said.

"If you don't have fire teams that are competent, you don't have squads that are competent," he said. "Then you don't have the ability to project force inside a volatile area, such as Baghdad."

The focus, then, for 1st Bn., 18th Inf. Regt., when

its Soldiers work with Iraqi Army Commando elements, is to provide a training foundation from which Iraqi Army leaders can work from in the future.

"They know a lot about combat," Smith said. "This unit was capable of clearing or seizing a target before we began training, but we're providing them a framework within which they understand what it means to train. This is how we do this, building blocks first. We work through marksmanship, short range marksmanship, room clearing at the fire team level, (clearing) hallways and stairwells, and then you graduate to squad level. Then you start throwing little things in like enemy personnel searches."

The live-fire shoot house exercise is very important to the Commando Battalion's mission, Amir said.

The mission is to defend Iraq from terrorists, capture them and get them to the judge, said Iraqi Army Sgt. Hasan Ali Ashour, an instructor with 2nd Com-

pany, Commando Battalion, 11th Iraqi Army Division.

"Terrorists destroy any neighborhood they go to," Hasan said. "The important thing is security and safety for local nationals. When we provide the security and safety for people, then they will start working with us. A lot of families have been hurt and displaced."

Soldiers with the 11th Commandos said they are like a family, even though they come from different backgrounds from different parts of Iraq.

"Even if we are from different provinces, when we're working as a team, we're all one hand," Hasan said. "Our team is an example to other people in Iraq of how people can come together for the betterment of our country; we're one hand to rebuild Iraq. We defend our country; we are the eye on Iraq. We have a hand like steel; we have to beat anybody to defend the country. We will continue fighting for the Iraqi people, because Iraq is in our blood." ♥

**I WILL CONTINUE TO REBUILD IRAQ
...UNTIL MY LAST BREATH, I WILL
ALWAYS KEEP FIGHTING.**

GEN. CASEY VISITS USD-C



BAGHDAD—Gen. George W. Casey Jr., 36th Army chief of staff, visited United States Division – Center Soldiers Dec. 25 at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

Casey and his wife, Sheila, spent their last Christmas before he retires from the

direction the military is going in the 21st century and commended them, as a whole, for a job well done.

“We’re finally getting to the point, after five or six years, where we can breathe again,” Casey said. “The fact that we’re get-

conducted on Soldiers who deployed in the last 10 years, it takes two to three years to recover from a one-year combat deployment. He said although Soldiers are resilient, when turned around to deploy faster than the time needed to recover, the effects build

from Cold War to urban tactics, Casey said.

“While we’ve been growing the Army, we’ve also been completing a transformation of the Army from a very good Cold War Army, to an Army designed to handle the challenges of the latter part of the 20th cen-

WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE FAMILIES WHO SACRIFICE SO MUCH AND WE ARE COMMITTED TO YOU SOLDIERS.

Army talking, eating and posing for photos with Soldiers in Baghdad.

During a town hall meeting, Casey discussed concerns facing the military and reminded Soldiers of the Army’s strength, the

ting to a sustainable deployment tempo for our Soldiers and Families is going to enable us to hold this all-volunteer force together for the long haul.”

Casey said according to all the studies

up quickly.

Because of the high tempo and demands put on Soldiers after Sept. 11, 2001, the Army has increased its size by almost 100,000 Soldiers since 2007, and refocused strategies

tury,” he said. “We have rebalanced many Soldiers away from Cold War skills, to skills more necessary for today’s challenges in the Middle East.”

Casey said the Army has stood down



Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. (left) listens to a United States Division – Center Soldier’s question, Dec. 25 during a holiday visit to Camp Liberty, Iraq.



STORY AND PHOTOS BY SGT. KIMBERLY JOHNSON 196TH MPAD, 25TH INF. DIV.

about 200 tank companies, air defense artillery and conventional artillery batteries, and stood up a corresponding number of Special Forces, civil affairs and military police companies.

“We are a fundamentally different Army than on Sept. 11, 2001; and a better one,” he said.

Casey said he specifically wanted Soldiers to understand that although the defense budget is being reduced, it is still almost three times what it was in 2001, and Family programs are the last items to cut down on budgeting.

“We are committed to the Families who sacrifice so much and we are committed to you Soldiers,” he said.

Capt. James A. Battle, an aviation liaison officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center and a Newport News, Va., native, said Casey’s visit boosts Soldiers’ morale, knowing their senior leadership believes in them and still has trust and confidence in what they are doing while deployed.

“Gen. Casey took the time out of his busy schedule to come see us, to spend Christmas with us, give us coins and actually took the time to sit down and talk with us about what to expect in the future of the Army,” Battle said. “He did a good battlefield circulation throughout the area of operation and made sure he made contact with as many troops as possible—it was smiling faces the whole time. The fact he came to visit us on his last Christmas before retiring, to show his gratitude and appreciation for what we do, means a lot to us.”

Before wrapping up his visit to USD-C headquarters, Casey told the Soldiers to remain steady and focused.

“I have spent the first 30 years of my career training to fight a war I never had to fight and the last 10 years learning to fight a war as it’s going on,” Casey said. “As resilient as we have been in meeting the challenges of this war, we must also prepare for the challenges of the second decade of this century. This war is a long-term ideological struggle against violent extremism, and our job is not done yet.”



Gen. George W. Casey Jr., Army chief of staff, gives Sgt. John Metress, an infantryman with Company B, 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division Center and a Spring Valley, N.Y., native, a coin Dec. 25 during Casey's holiday visit to Camp Liberty, Iraq.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. (right) speaks to Soldiers with United States Division Center Dec. 25 during a holiday visit to Camp Liberty, Iraq.



DAGGER COMMAND MAKES HOLIDAY ROUNDS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SPC. **DANIEL STOUTAMIRE**
2ND AAB, 1ST INF. DIV., USD-C

BAGHDAD—For many Soldiers deployed far from the comforts of home and the loving embrace of Family, Christmastime can be difficult to bear.

To help alleviate feelings of homesickness and loneliness among the Soldiers under their command, as well as recognize their hard work and achievements, Col. Paul Calvert, commander of 2nd Advise and Assist Bri-

gade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center, and Command Sgt. Maj. Rodney Lewis, command sergeant major of 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., traveled throughout the brigade's area of operations Dec. 24-25, visiting some of the more remote joint security stations and combat outposts at which their Soldiers are working.

"It's hard for anybody to make the transition to being away from home and Family and that sense of normalcy that you have back in the states," Calvert said. "Command Sgt. Maj. Lewis and I have taken the opportunity to get around to

every location where our Soldiers are throughout Baghdad province and wish them a Merry Christmas, and just take some time to talk with them and make sure they're doing all right."

The command team of Calvert and Lewis, along with Maj. Charles Paul, chaplain with 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., traveled to Joint Security Station Loyalty, Combat Outpost Falcon and Camp Taji on Christmas Eve. The next day, they visited Soldiers at Forward Operating Base Hammer, Joint Security Station Al Rasheed, Joint Security Station Deason and Joint Security Station Nasir Wa Salam.



Command Sgt. Maj. Toney Smith (second from left), command sergeant major with 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center, recognizes Pfc. Kurt Schoenig, with 1st Bn., 63rd Armor Regt., 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div. and a Smithtown, N.Y., native, for outstanding service Dec. 25 at Joint Security Station Nasir Wa Salam, Iraq.



Col. Paul Calvert (center), commander of 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division Center, recognizes Staff Sgt. Richard Cripps (right), with Company D, 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment, 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div. and a Doylestown, Pa., native, Dec. 25 for outstanding service at Joint Security Station Al Rasheed, Iraq.

All of the locations had festive decorations in the dining facilities and in many of the offices, as Soldiers and leaders took it upon themselves to make their living and working spaces a little more like home.

For many of the Soldiers with the brigade, it is their first time being away from their Family for the holidays. For those Soldiers, it is important to lean on their friends who have gone through this before, Lewis said.

“There are Soldiers they can turn to that have experienced this, who know how to deal with some of these things, who understand the sacrifices the Fami-

lies go through and how to deal with that, both as a Soldier and a Family member,” he said.

Calvert agreed, emphasizing that the bond between Soldiers can help them get each other through Christmas in Iraq.

“(Younger Soldiers) need to reach out to those more experienced Soldiers and rally around them and understand that, while they have a physical separation from their Families, they have a professional Family all around them,” he said.

Pfc. Stephanie Cuevo, a medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div. and a Roseville,

Calif., native, is spending her first Christmas overseas.

“(My battle buddies) are always there for me when I go through tough times,” she said. “Even though they’re mostly guys, they always do their best to relate.”

Another reason Calvert and Lewis circulated on Christmas was to recognize Soldiers nominated by their leadership for outstanding performance. At each stop, they handed out coins and spoke individually with each Soldier so recognized.

“I’m proud to see what they’re doing, their achievements and accomplishments, the way they’re interacting with each oth-

er, with our Iraqi partners, how they act in a professional manner,” Lewis said. “It’s amazing to see these young Soldiers, and how they are adapting and overcoming.”

Calvert had some advice for Soldiers during the holiday season and beyond, and praised his Soldiers’ resourcefulness.

“Stay focused,” Calvert said. “Stay diligent in how you approach the mission, take care of the guys on your left and right. They’ll have a bad day every now and then and so will you, and then they will take care of you. It’s a manner in which Soldiers stay resilient. Soldiers can make Christmas out of anything.”



Sgt. Justin Hendricks, with Company D, 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division Center and a Harper, Ore., native, hangs Christmas decorations Dec. 25 in the dining facility at Joint Security Station Deason, Iraq.



Story and photos by Capt. Jacqueline Rabston, 299th BSB, 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., 25th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD—Seeking to alleviate boredom for off-duty Soldiers, the unit ministry team with 299th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division – Center opened what it termed “the battalion living room” at the collection of containerized housing units commonly referred to as ‘Pad 13’ at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

This space, just outside the chaplain’s office, is furnished with couches, a television, and cupboards and shelves which are full of items for Soldiers to use. Welcoming everyone who enters is a sign that reads, “Welcome to the Living Room. Keep your language respectful, your attitude positive, and make this a great place to LIVE.”

“We want it to be a safe place for people to come and feel welcome,” said Capt. Diana Crane, chaplain with 299th BSB, 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div. and a Portland, Ore., native. “We intend for this to be a good place to relax and unwind.”

Crane came up with the idea of renaming the space—previously allotted for Morale, Welfare and Recreation—after listening to a speech by Maj. Gen. Doug Carver, U.S. Army chief of chaplains. “He said to focus on positive living...so I thought this would be a good way to start,” Crane said.

Crane said she believes that allowing Soldiers to have a fun and relaxing place to gather will help to prevent the isolation that can contribute to depression during long periods away from Family and support systems at home. Having this space near the chaplain’s office



Capt. Diana Crane (second from right), chaplain with 299th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, United States Division Center and a Portland, Ore., native, sits and talks with Soldiers from the battalion Dec. 8 in the Living Room recreational area at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

means that she is available to provide support and counseling for Soldiers when they deal with difficult situations that may arise during this deployment.

When the chaplain is not available in the Living Room, the space is staffed with an “Internet watch” Soldier, a duty shared throughout the battalion. This Soldier has responsibility for keeping the room tidy, greeting people as they come through the door and is the guardian of the television’s

remote control.

Crane and her assistant, Spc. Ernestina Nyarko, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 299th BSB, 2nd AAB, 1st Inf. Div., said they intend to add a video gaming system, a DVD player and some upbeat artwork to increase the room’s appeal.

The room already contains computers and phones that allow overseas connections so Soldiers can have contact with their loved ones, which is free on the Internet and with only

minimal cost on the phones.

There is a hot beverage bar with a variety of teas, coffees and cocoa to help Soldiers stay awake and warm up on cooler mornings, and there is a refrigerator full of cold beverages for hot afternoons. Crane said a favorite item is a popcorn popper that is filled with buttery, movie-style popcorn every day, which is a big attraction for Soldiers to come in and have afternoon snacks. There are hygiene supplies and a variety of snacks available for Soldiers to take

as needed. A cupboard full of games and shelves full of books and magazines complete the atmosphere of a homey, living space where anyone can come and hang out with friends.

In addition, Soldiers know they can come in and find support and encouragement from the unit ministry team whenever it is needed.

“I like that Soldiers come to visit throughout the day,” Crane said. “It gives me a chance to see people and assess how they are doing.”

JINGLE BELLS ROCK

25TH INFANTRY DIVISION ROCK BAND BRINGS CHRISTMAS CHEER TO USD-C

STORY AND PHOTO BY CPL. DANIEL EDDY, 196TH MPAD, 25TH INF. DIV., USD-C

BAGHDAD—Air guitar, headbanging and loud rock music reverberated through the crowd at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation center Christmas evening at Camp Liberty, Iraq as the 25th Infantry Division band entertained United States Division – Center Soldiers.

The six-member band “Show of Force”, all wearing Santa Claus hats, kept the Soldiers smiling, and cheering while high-fiving the crowd and handing out candy as they sang and played.

“I think the interaction the band had with the crowd (was the best part),” said Lt. Col. Paul Rom-

agnoli, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Inf. Div., United States Division – Center and a Fresno, Calif., native. “Every person was there to be part (of the entertainment).”

Romagnoli said the band did an outstanding job and always draws a crowd. People come in from everywhere once they hear the music playing, and the band always puts on a great performance.

“The band has a very unique mission,” he said. “Not only do they play patriotic music, but they really do help with morale. Playing music that someone is familiar with ... it really gives them a sense of being home, that little connection that they wouldn’t normally get in Iraq. It also helps to break up the day and it gives them something to look forward to.”

The music and high energy was maintained as band members kept an upbeat tempo throughout the concert all.

“(Performing at a high energy level) is all part of the show,” said Sgt. Jared Bree, band operations non-commissioned officer and keyboardist with the division rock band, and a Crescent City, Calif., native. “Even when we are standing in the back, you still need to put yourself into the music, but not over the top so that you are drawing attention away from the singer but still getting into and increasing the level of enjoyment for the crowd.”

Bree said it’s nice to have people clap and smile, which makes him feel good about his job, and that he is doing good things for the Army.

Bree said even though he cannot be home for Christmas, performing for the troops helps replace the time away from loved ones.

“It helps to make up for (not being home for Christmas),” he said. “Coming here and doing my job ... helps me have a great Christmas. I look forward to a year over here, doing a good job.”



Sgt. Brendan Owen (from left), lead guitarist with the division band, 25th Infantry Division, United States Division – Center and a Tulsa, Okla., native; Staff Sgt. Kristopher Boltinghouse, rhythm guitarist and a Hannibal, Mo., native; Staff Sgt. Christopher Stone, lead singer and a Salem, Ohio, native; and Spc. Jonathan Crane, bass player and a Hartford, Conn., native, entertain troops with their finale Dec. 25 during a holiday concert at Camp Liberty, Iraq.



LIGHTNING SIX SENDS

"LIGHTNING IN THE NEW DAWN"



To the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, interagency partners and civilians of United States Division – Center Team:

I ask you to recall what we

learned about ourselves on Sept. 11, 2001 and how we acted immediately following. Most Americans willingly made sacrifices and changes to their nor-

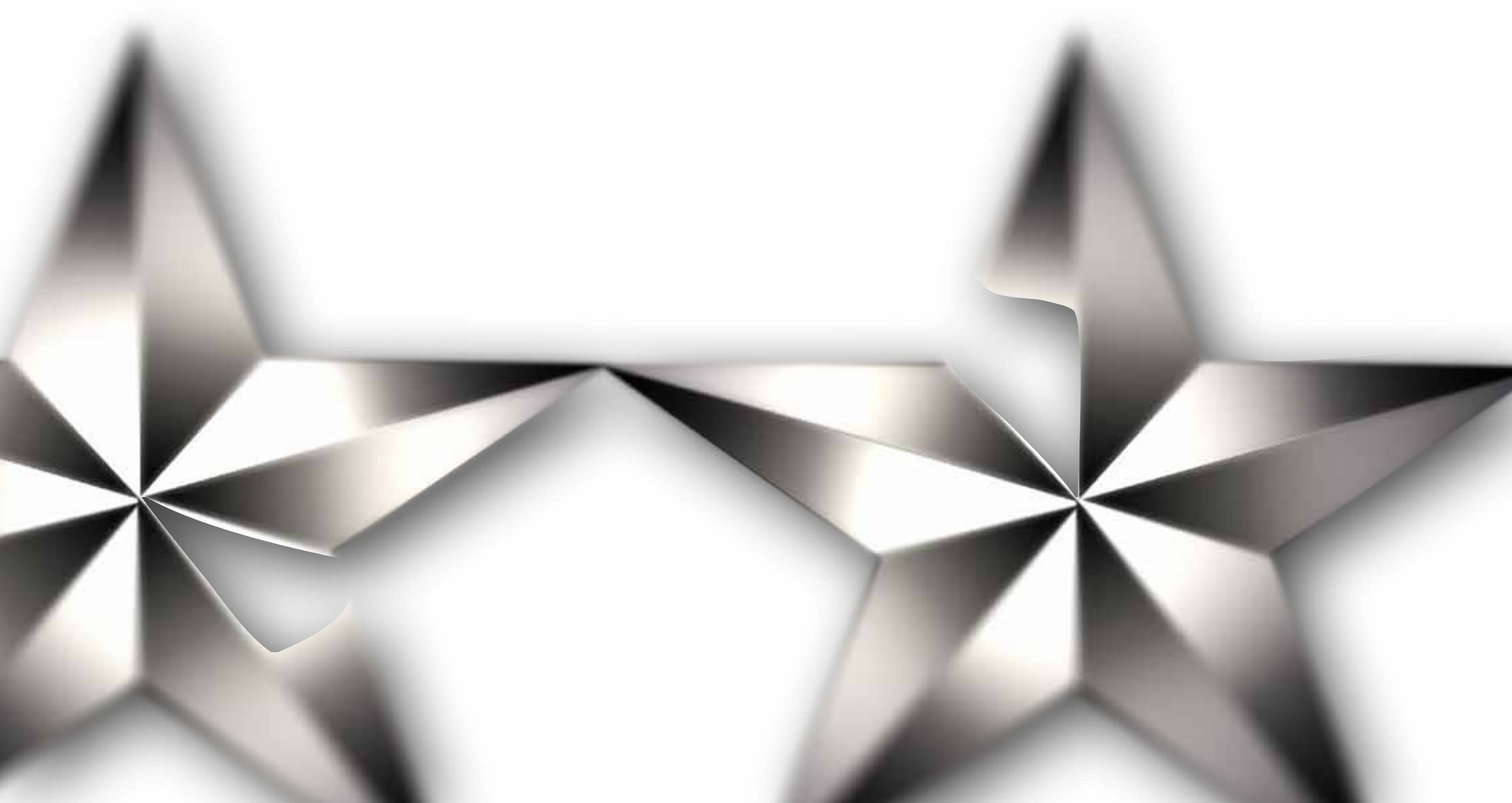
mal routines. For different reasons, our current mission asks that we do it once again. The challenge ahead will require us to march a little further, carry a heavier load, and step into the unknown for the mission and for the well-being of the team. The transition to more stringent living conditions will become the norm and to succeed we must embrace the return to simplicity and necessity.

Today's mission is no less difficult and no less important than previous Operation Iraqi Freedom rotations, but it will require more sacrifice. Your dedication will demonstrate who we are and what we are collectively capable of accomplishing. As we move forward, we will downsize nonessential services and other luxuries which provide comforts not essential to accomplish our new mission. A blue collar, roll up the sleeves approach will ensure our suc-

cess and set the conditions for a responsible and measured end of mission. This is the approach we need to take and is the approach we are certainly capable of taking.

During the new year, we will face numerous challenges that will require us to remain agile and adaptive. Leaders will challenge us to achieve mission success with less. That said, there isn't a single doubt we can do just that ... willingly and selflessly. We have the best team in the world and our actions are on display for everyone to see. Choose to lead by your powerful example and develop the irreversible momentum required to end this mission responsibly and with honor. Let everyone know ours is a legacy of self-denial, service and sacrifice.

Bernard S. Champoux
Major General, USA
Commanding





LIGHTNING SEVEN SENDS

"LIGHTNING IN THE NEW DAWN"



The 25th Infantry Division and United States Division – Center welcomes the Vanguard, Dagger and Snake Teams with Aloha. This is the first of many transitions, and with that comes a new set of eyes, ideas, added vigilance to standards and a strong sense of force protection. I cannot say enough about the hard work that our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Department of Defense civilians and inter-agency partners have done in helping Iraq become a sovereign and self-reliant country. It is through these efforts that Iraq will enjoy the freedoms of a stable government with a confident, capable and stable security force. The Iraqi people will one day have the opportunity to celebrate their independence as a united sovereign country as we do in America.

As we continue to advise, assist, train and equip the Iraqi forces, it is critical that we un-

derstand our role. We must capitalize on the role of being trainers, and continue to strengthen our Iraqi Security Forces partnership and relationship. This will enable us to assist them in setting the conditions in their upcoming celebrations and regional summit. Setting the successful conditions for these events will be monumental for the Iraqi people, their government and their country. This will only carry forward to their future, and help set the conditions for the Iraqis to hold a credible and secure position within the Middle East region. We do this through the ISF, allowing them to gain the credibility of being a competent security force that the Iraqi people can trust and call upon when needed. Many of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines are conducting this task everyday with phenomenal results throughout USD-C.

The hard work of ser-

vice members who have come before us over the past seven years has ensured that the ISF were exposed to the quality and excellence of a professional military with ethical and moral standards. As professional military service members in USD-C, we must continue to display our high standards, and continue to sustain the ethical and moral high ground at all times while we continue to foster a long term partnership with a new Iraqi government and its people.

Understanding the Iraqi culture and respecting their traditions will go a long way as we develop new relationships, and assist in their celebrations and traditions within the Iraqi culture. Building long term partnerships and relationships will have growing pains as we conduct transitions, however, we may be able to limit these through transparency and provide training to influence the mission and effects on the ground.

We can also influence our relationship through the enforcement of standards, discipline and professionalism on and off all operational bases. Our Iraqi partners continue to laud the professionalism of every service member in USD-C. Let's continue to hold the standards and discipline that we are known for throughout the world. This is a great

opportunity for our partners and the people of Iraq as we assist and support them with their constitution, laws and government. We must continue to be transparent in our leadership and assistance as we provide guidance to help strengthen the ISF to find solutions to their security, stability, economic and infrastructure development.

During this transitional period and new mission in support of Operation New Dawn, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have performed with the utmost professionalism in USD-C. Continue to stay focused on the mission at hand, stay vigilant and physically fit. Know that the time and sacrifices invested through the years will benefit the Middle East region in stability and economic growth, more importantly the Iraqi people. Stay Safe, **TROPIC LIGHTNING!**

CSM Frank M. Leota
Command Sergeant Major
United States Division –
Center





The gift of giving

Story and photos by

Sgt. Jesus J. Aranda

25th Inf. Div., USID-C

BAGHDAD—During the holiday season, when many Americans are surrounded by the comfort of their homes and the company of their loved ones, some are away, in service to their country.

Recognizing this, many military supporters, Family members and volunteers donate hours of their time to ensure deployed service members know people still hold a special place at the dinner table in honor of their sacrifices.

For Sgt. Chase Martin, an intelligence analyst with Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, United States Division – Center and an Idaho Falls, Idaho, native, the support of such people has always been available to

him during his military service.

"The community I live in is very supportive of the military," Martin said. "We have a National Guard unit nearby and many know what it is like to have a loved one deployed."

out an ad in the paper," Martin said. "We had many volunteers who packed the boxes, donated items or shipped the boxes to help out."

Martin said the experience of personally delivering the

It feels good knowing that, as we draw down here, and live in an austere environment, that someone is thinking of us.

Many people in Martin's Family are active members of a charity group known as Operation Iraqi Star, a volunteer-driven group which sends gifts and care packages to deployed Soldiers during the holidays.

"My parents and wife took

gratitude of his community was a fulfilling and familiar privilege.

"It feels great," Martin said, with a smile. "It was two years ago that I was passing out gifts from home while deployed, and here I am again."



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Laschwann Killens (left), imagery officer-in-charge with 25th Special Troops Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, and a Honolulu native, receives a gift box from then-Spc. Chase Martin, Dec. 25, 2008, at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.

Martin said during the 25th Infantry Division's prior deployment in 2008 to Contingency Operating Base Speicher,

Iraq, Martin handed out just as many care packages sent from his hometown in support of him and his fellow Soldiers. Because of this, it was no surprise to his co-workers when dozens of care packages began to flood his mailbox.

"The mail clerk here recognized me from last deployment," Martin said, laughing. "A lot of mail comes for me."

Martin said it's thanks to this mail that many deployed Soldiers can enjoy a gift when he or she may not have received one.

"It feels good knowing that, as we draw down here, and live in an austere environment, that someone is thinking of us," Martin said. "Someone here will appreciate a gift sent from a stranger and their morale and spirits will be boosted."

Thanks to Operation Iraqi Star, more than 100 care packages and gifts were distributed to the Soldiers at Camp Liberty, Iraq, on Christmas Eve and just as many spirits were boosted. ♥



Sgt. Chase Martin (left), an intelligence analyst with Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, United States Division – Center and an Idaho Falls, Idaho, native, hands a care package to a fellow Soldier Dec. 24 at Camp Liberty, Iraq.

FITNESS CORNER

TOTAL BODY NEW YEAR

SQUAT PUSH UPS



Begin in a squat position, with your toes pointed outward. Keep your hands open in front of you. Keep the squat position and slowly lower your upper body down, bracing your weight on your hands. Lower your upper body down into a push up position. Push yourself back up into the squat position. Keep your legs bent throughout the exercise and keep the squat position. Perform three sets of 10 repetitions.

CABLE SQUAT WOOD CHOP



Position the cable to the bottom-most setting of the cable and attach the rope grip. Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart, perpendicular to the cable. Grip the rope with both hands, starting near your right foot. Lower your legs into a squat position. Simultaneously, as you straighten your legs, swing your arms across your body toward the left side of your head. Keep your arms straight throughout the movement. Then swing your arms back across your body, down toward your right ankle and squat down. Repeat 15 times, then switch sides. Perform three sets of 15 repetitions on each side.



BURPEES

Begin with a squat, placing your hands on the ground in front of you. Kick your feet back together into a plank position. Be sure to keep your abdominals flexed and your back flat. Next, jump to bring your feet back to your hands (the starting position). Then explode upward by jumping off the ground, reaching your arms and hands straight above your head. Repeat the exercise, moving as fast as possible. Repeat three sets of 15-20 repetitions.

Advanced: Do a push up when you are in the plank position. Repeat the rest of the exercise as normal.

THE 'JUST DO IT' RESOLUTION

Is this the year you're going to uphold your New Year's fitness resolution? Let's face it—it's not all that difficult to start a fitness routine. Most of us have done it more than once. The trouble, of course, comes with sticking with it for an extended period of time. Too often, our initial enthusiasm and energy wanes, we get distracted by other things going on or we don't think we're seeing results quickly enough—that's when we throw in the towel. On average, only 20 percent of us are successful at keeping our New Year's resolutions and the biggest failure rate is in the fitness realm.

So how do the faithful 20 percent manage to stick with it? They would no sooner miss a workout than skip a morning shower. Fitness isn't just a plan you embark on, along with a diet, to reach your goals. It's a lifelong love of movement that will help you maintain good health and the physique you want. The key is choosing something you love doing and nurturing your feelings every step of the way.

Here are some tips to help you reach your goals and achieve your New Year's fitness resolution once and for all.

1. *Just do it.* If you think about it, you can talk yourself out of it almost every time. Ignore your brain's chatter and make exercise a non-negotiable part of the day. Just lace up your shoes and get out there. Tell yourself you will only work out for 15 minutes. If after that, you really don't feel like working out, then leave. But more often than not, it's starting the exercise that is the toughest part. Don't give the excuse, I wanted to, but **JUST DO IT** and stop making excuses.

2. *Find exercises you enjoy.* You are more likely to stick with your exercise if you do activities you enjoy. Keep experimenting until you find something that moves you mentally and physically. Check out the fitness schedule of classes in the Lightning Gym or even explore the Victory Gym to find a class that interests you.

3. *Exercise with a battle buddy.* Having the commitment of another person will only reinforce your commitment to yourself. When you work out with a partner, you are more likely to stay with your program and reach your goals more often than those who work out alone.

4. *Chart your progress with short, small fitness goals.* Aim to set goals that are clear and realistic, not too broad or ambitious. Create a specific plan to reach your goals and work in baby steps. A journal can help you to recognize positive steps you have made.

5. *Reward yourself.* Making a behavior change is difficult, and requires time and patience and deserves a reward. Decide on a goal and a reward to work toward, possibly a new pair of shoes, after reaching a certain mileage or achieving a 300 on your APFT. Do whatever works for you, work hard and earn your reward.

Strive to feel better, to have more energy and be less stressed. Notice the small things exercise does for you quickly, rather than getting hung up on the narrow goal of the number on a scale.

If you look too far down the road too quickly, you may be disappointed. Perhaps the most important thing you need for a successful fitness program is patience—know you are going to get better each day. Finally, commit yourself to becoming more fit. You can be a part of the 20 percent this year...**JUST DO IT!**



Capt. Sarah Baumgardner is a graduate of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where she majored in exercise physiology. She is certified by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) as a health fitness specialist (HFS). She has worked as a personal trainer and nutritional consultant, training a wide range of demographics. She brings enthusiasm and motivation to inspiring, coaching and increasing Soldiers' fitness levels.

Post 9/11 G.I. Bill

Recent changes could affect you

A law was recently signed passing a series of changes to the Chapter 33, Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. The changes, most of which will take effect Aug. 1, are meant to make the process of accessing benefits easier for veteran-students. However, some of the changes may mean limitations to the amount of benefits available for some veterans.



THE GOOD

- THE POST 9/11 G.I. BILL WILL NOW PAY ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL TUITION AND FEES, INCLUDING GRADUATE SCHOOL.
- COLLEGE FUND PAYMENTS WILL NOW BE PAID ON A MONTHLY BASIS INSTEAD OF A LUMP SUM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TERM. THOSE TRAINING AT HALF-TIME OR LESS ARE NOW ELIGIBLE FOR COLLEGE FUND PAYMENTS.
- REIMBURSEMENT IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR MULTIPLE LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION TESTS.
- REIMBURSEMENT IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR FEES PAID TO TAKE NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS USED FOR ADMISSION TO AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING (E.G. SAT, LSAT, ACT, GMAT, ETC).
- VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PARTICIPANTS MAY NOW ELECT THE HIGHER HOUSING ALLOWANCE OFFERED BY THE POST-9/11 GI BILL IF OTHERWISE ELIGIBLE FOR THE POST-9/11 GI BILL.
- DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENTS ATTENDING AT LEAST ONE CLASS ON-CAMPUS WILL NOW RECEIVE A MONTHLY LIVING STIPEND HALF THE RATE OF THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.

THE BAD

- MONTHLY BENEFITS WILL BE PRORATED BASED ON THE NUMBER OF DAYS IN WHICH A SEMESTER OR QUARTER IS IN SESSION. THIS MEANS IF YOUR SEMESTER ENDS DEC. 15, YOUR CHAPTER 33 PAYMENT FOR THE MONTH WILL BE FOR 15 DAYS ONLY AND PAYMENTS WILL NOT RESUME UNTIL YOUR NEXT SEMESTER BEGINS.
- STUDENTS ENROLLED ONLY FULL-TIME WILL RECEIVE THE MONTHLY LIVING STIPEND AT THE FULL RATE, A BENEFIT PREVIOUSLY AFFORDED TO ANY STUDENT ENROLLED MORE THAN HALF-TIME. STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED FULL-TIME WILL BE PAID A LIVING STIPEND PRORATED, BASED ON THE NUMBER OF CREDITS THEY ARE TAKING. STUDENTS ENROLLED LESS THAN HALF-TIME WILL REMAIN INELIGIBLE FOR THE STIPEND.
- THE CAP ON TUITION AND FEES WILL NO LONGER BE BASED ON THE COST OF IN-STATE UNDERGRADUATE TUITION AND FEES FOR THE MOST EXPENSIVE FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN A GIVEN STATE. THE NEW LAW SETS A NATIONWIDE CAP OF \$17,500 OF COVERAGE PER YEAR. BEYOND THAT, STUDENTS WILL HAVE TO PAY OUT-OF-POCKET.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO WWW.GIBILL.VA.GOV